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COVER STORY.

James Reilly

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Each salon operator interviewed for this story spent time and lent devotion to my slew of questions — much like they do at their salons. Below are some of their thoughtful answers not included in our feature.

City Paper: What happened that salons didn't stay popular after the 19th century? Why do they seem to be cropping up again?

JR: The salons fell out of favor as the business of art became more organized by larger commercial organizations. Suddenly they were driven not only by the love of art, but also by monetary concerns. There is a renaissance in the United States today, that reflects the seismic shift in the music "business." As the drive for ever larger profits has led to the devolution of the way the business of music is conducted, more and more artists and audiences are seeking to regain control and access to the joy of the craft. We are witnessing a huge growth in what has been called "house concerts" across the country, where lovers of music are offering their living rooms as venues to host touring or local musicians' performances.

CP: So why you? And why The PSALM?

JR: The PSALM Salon has been at the forefront of this wave, along with many other wonderful programs in the Philadelphia region. Our friend Andrea Clearfield's salon is by far the oldest and most established of these, at 23 years and counting. My wife, Suyun, and I have offered our home to the PSALM Salon for five years now, and it is growing by leaps and bounds. ... The acronym PSALM is derived from the wisdom of the Old Testament prophet David, who used poetry and song in worship of the divine, thus united the warring tribes of the region in peace for many decades. PSALM is not a religious organization in any way, but does ascribe a higher universal nature to man that may be awakened and developed through seeking intrinsic beauty in all its manifestations.

CP: Is this a job, a calling, both?

JR: I am the chairman of PSALM, and the host of the PSALM Salon. This is the source of my joy in offering hospitality to the community in accord with the goals of the society. As a longtime student of mystical traditions including yoga and Sufism, I follow a central tenet of these traditions in welcoming strangers with generosity into my home. This is in keeping with my somewhat quirky-visionary nature, and occupational history in the music world. For many years I was a musician, recording and tour sound engineer, audio equipment design engineer, road manager, club and performance theater manager, and longtime yoga teacher. I am also a physical therapist, graphic artist, husband and father of four. I also run a small recording studio called VirtuaLux, and have a boutique label called LuxMusica Records which provides the PSALM Salon with its technical capabilities. Our society boasts a who's-who board of directors and advisers of international stature in the arts, education and world/personal transformation fields. ... I am honored and grateful to have such an illustrious brain trust behind our efforts.

CP: Do you feel as if there is a greater aesthetic at work — a PSALM ideal — that reflects who you are?

JR: This is an interesting question. For some, there may be an over-arching aesthetic at work, which also may be obvious to pick up on. For me, it is much more subtle. I feel like it is my job to prepare a tabula rasa, a blank slate, for an ephemeral beauty to reveal itself upon. Once the space has been prepared, and the invitations have gone out ... it is always a joy and surprise to see what comes.

CP: There is nirvana in all of this, isn't there?

JR: The peak moment for me occurs when I feel that the performers and audience have entered into the "zone." There is a palpable shift in the feel, an altered sense of boundaries and time ... a synchronicity where the continuum of consciousness merges and we are all "one" in the moment. It happens quite often. Oftentimes there will be several seconds of stillness and silence after a piece. The audience has forgotten how to clap. It is exquisite.

CP: I've been to your home. It's cozy.

JR: For the most part, people are very respectful. We have not had anything terrible happen. The worst is people forgetfully leaving trash on our floors that we clean up before going to bed. We have a few stalwart volunteers who help us out, though, for which I am exceedingly grateful. We always look for more good hearted folks to help out. There is a lot to do with booking, artist relations, publicity, recording and mixing the shows, and event logistics.

CP: You told me previously that you were a big sound guy. Who have you worked with?

JR: I worked as sound engineer or tour manager with many of the big rock groups from the '70s including Aerosmith, Frank Zappa, Mahavishnu Orchestra, Captain Beefheart, Paul Butterfield Blues Band and many others. I was technical director for the Fenway Theater in Boston, which is now the Berklee Performance Center, and managed the club Unicorn which featured groups like James Taylor, Grace Slick, Dave Van Ronk, Peter Frampton, Maria Muldaur and John Lee Hooker. ... I was also the owner of Village Sound in Boston which did concert sound and built loudspeakers for groups like Bonnie Raitt.

CP: No wonder you like to spend time at home. What do you hope happens after this story comes out?

JR: I have a feeling we may need to hire a bouncer after this comes out to keep the crowds down.

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